

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

December 31, 2009

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President Obama on Aviation Security Procedures*Directs immediate review of aviation screening technology*

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
December 29, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY

SUBJECT: Aviation Screening Technology and Procedures Review

On December 27, 2009, I directed that an immediate review of aviation screening technology be initiated. This review should be led by the Department of Homeland Security, working with other departments and agencies including the Department of Energy and the National Laboratories. All aspects of aviation screening technology and procedures regarding domestic and international air travel should be considered as part of this review. This review shall be conducted in a manner that does not interfere with the ongoing criminal investigation and prosecution of any individuals involved in the attempt to detonate an explosive device onboard Northwest flight 253 on December 25, 2009.

A preliminary report, including recommendations for strengthening aviation screening technology and procedures and outlining how the Department of Homeland Security plans to proceed, shall be provided to the White House Staff Secretary by December 31, 2009. Follow-up direction will be provided, as appropriate, based on the contents of the December 31, 2009, report.

BARACK OBAMA

President Obama on Preliminary Information About Attempted Terrorist Attack*Security reviews under way in wake of Detroit incident on Christmas Day*

The White House
Office of the Press Secretary
December 29, 2009

Statement by the President on Preliminary Information from his Ongoing Consultation about the Detroit Incident

Kaneohe Bay Marine Base, Kaneohe, Hawaii

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Yesterday I updated the American people on the immediate steps we took -- the increased screening and security of air travel -- to keep our country safe in the wake of the attempted terrorist attack on Christmas Day. And I announced two

reviews -- a review of our terrorist watch list system and a review of our air travel screening, so we can find out what went wrong, fix it and prevent future attacks.

Those reviews began on Sunday and are now underway. Earlier today I issued the former [sic] guidelines for those reviews and directed that preliminary findings be provided to the White House by this Thursday. It's essential that we diagnose the problems quickly and deal with them immediately.

Now, the more comprehensive, formal reviews and recommendations for improvement will be completed in the coming weeks, and I'm committed to working with Congress and our intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security communities to take all necessary steps to protect the country.

I wanted to speak to the American people again today because some of this preliminary information that has surfaced in the last 24 hours raises some serious concerns. It's been widely reported that the father of the suspect in the Christmas incident warned U.S. officials in Africa about his son's extremist views. It now appears that weeks ago this information was passed to a component of our intelligence community, but was not effectively distributed so as to get the suspect's name on a no-fly list.

There appears to be other deficiencies as well. Even without this one report there were bits of information available within the intelligence community that could have and should have been pieced together. We've achieved much since 9/11 in terms of collecting information that relates to terrorists and potential terrorist attacks. But it's becoming clear that the system that has been in place for years now is not sufficiently up to date to take full advantage of the information we collect and the knowledge we have.

Had this critical information been shared it could have been compiled with other intelligence and a fuller, clearer picture of the suspect would have emerged. The warning signs would have triggered red flags and the suspect would have never been allowed to board that plane for America.

The professionalism of the men and women in our intelligence, counterterrorism and law enforcement and homeland security communities is extraordinary. They are some of the most hardworking, most dedicated Americans that I've ever met. In pursuit of our security here at home they risk their lives, day in and day out, in this country and around the world.

Few Americans see their work, but all Americans are safer because of their successes. They have targeted and taken out violent extremists, they have disrupted plots and

saved countless American lives; they are making real and daily progress in our mission to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda and other extremist networks around the world. And for this every American owes them a profound and lasting debt of gratitude.

Moreover, as Secretary Napolitano has said, once the suspect attempted to take down Flight 253 -- after his attempt it's clear that passengers and crew, our homeland security systems and our aviation security took all appropriate actions. But what's also clear is this: When our government has information on a known extremist and that information is not shared and acted upon as it should have been, so that this extremist boards a plane with dangerous explosives that could cost nearly 300 lives, a systemic failure has occurred. And I consider that totally unacceptable.

The reviews I've ordered will surely tell us more. But what already is apparent is that there was a mix of human and systemic failures that contributed to this potential catastrophic breach of security. We need to learn from this episode and act quickly to fix the flaws in our system, because our security is at stake and lives are at stake.

I fully understand that even when every person charged with ensuring our security does what they are trained to do, even when every system works exactly as intended there is still no one hundred percent guarantee of success. Yet, this should only compel us to work even harder, to be even more innovative and relentless in our efforts.

As President I will do everything in my power to support the men and women in intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security to make sure they've got the tools and resources they need to keep America safe. But it's also my job to ensure that our intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security systems and the people in them are working effectively and held accountable. I intend to fulfill that responsibility and insist on accountability at every level.

That's the spirit guiding our reviews into the attempted attack on Christmas Day. That's the spirit that will guide all our efforts in the days and years ahead.

Thank you very much.

Extension of Duty-Free Trade Program, Andean Trade Preference Act

President Obama extends by one year program that helps developing countries

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
December 29, 2009

Statement from the Press Secretary on the Extension of the Generalized System of Preferences Program and the Andean Trade Preferences Act

Yesterday, the President signed legislation extending for a year the duty-free treatment available to 131 developing countries under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program. This legislation also extends for a year the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA) program, which currently applies to imports from Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. We welcome this legislation as a renewed statement of America's commitment to work with developing countries to increase their participation in the global trading system. GSP increases trade, creates good jobs for our economy, and further helps to expand choices and lower costs for U.S. consumers and industry. In part due to the market opening under the GSP program, the United States is one of the world's most open economies to products of developing countries and this helps alleviate poverty globally.

Extension of the ATPA program will also encourage trade and help countries in the Andean region combat the scourge of narcotics production and trafficking. The legislation did not restore benefits to Bolivia. We believe that the United States and Bolivia need to work closely together to improve cooperation with respect to our common objective of combating the production of and trafficking in illicit narcotics. The President has directed the Administration to work with the government of Bolivia to improve cooperation, and if cooperation improves, to work with Congress to restore benefits to Bolivia under the ATPA program.

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